

*Kulturelle Langzeitfolgen industriellen Strukturwandels. Ruhrgebiet – Tschechien – Slowakei. Hrsg. von Stefan Berger, Frank Halder, Roman Holec und Kristina Kaiserová. (Veröffentlichungen der Deutsch-Tschechischen und Deutsch-Slowakischen Historikerkommission, Bd. 25.) Leipziger Universitätsverlag, Leipzig 2022. 389 S., Ill., Tab., Kt. ISBN 978-3-96023-384-8. (€ 32,-.)* – This edited volume is the result of a conference held in October 2017 by the Deutsch-Tschechischen und Deutsch-Slowakischen Historikerkommission at the Ruhr Museum in Essen. It follows two well-established patterns in contemporary economic history in that it both explores transnational entanglements and international comparisons and focuses on the cultural aspect of (de-)industrialization. The industrial regions under scrutiny are the Ruhr, the Bohemian Lands, and Slovakia. The temporal scope of the work is quite broad and encompasses both pre-industrialization in the mid-eighteenth century, the heyday of industrial capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century, and the difficulties faced by today's postindustrial economies, especially regarding their material and cultural heritage. The “long-lasting cultural consequences” of the (post-)industrial transformation are also understood very broadly. While some authors tend to focus on culture as a set of social practices and analyze, for example, working-class or bourgeois culture in the context of economic transformations, others see culture in a more traditional and narrower way—as cultural institutions (museums, libraries) or the intersection of business and art (patronage) or non-profit oriented activity (charity). The different levels of analysis also contribute to this diverse, if not somewhat chaotic picture. Some contributions focus on case studies of concrete industrial works or entrepreneurial families, while others analyze entire industrial regions or even national-level economic problems. This dissonance may be an inevitable result of the initial decision to compare the Ruhr with the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia, which is neither an obvious nor an easy comparison, given the vast structural differences between these regions. Despite the first impression of the volume as somewhat unordered, several contributions deserve praise for their quality and innovative approach. In the German section, these include the analysis of the Ruhr urban elites and their strategies to deal with uncontrolled urban growth and social problems in the late nineteenth century (Jürgen Reulecke) and the brilliant study of mine architecture and social policies and their evolution under different regimes and economic challenges (Dagmar Kift). In the Czech and Slovak sections, the analysis of the female workers' situation in the state-owned late-Habsburg tobacco factories (Marie Macková) and the study of the Slovak industrialist families and their adaptation to the regime change in 1918 (Roman Holec) particularly deserve a mention. All these contributions consider the interdependence of culture and economy in its full depth and put forward interesting research questions. Unfortunately, some other authors seem to have added the question of “cultural change” in addition to their pre-existing framework of “classical” economic history and failed to explore the possibilities of a more culture-based approach. In these contributions, the cultural aspect, even in its narrow and traditional sense, seems to have fallen victim to the method based on “hard” production or employment data. Notwithstanding the above, the volume praises international cooperation among historians and calls for more comparative frameworks rather than posing any new questions or proposing a clearly defined research field. Yet, far from neglecting the positive aspects of such an approach, one could ask if the volume might have benefited from a narrower timeframe or a comparison based on structural similarities between the researched regions. Previous publications by the Historikerkommission have proven that combining both approaches is not only possible but can also be fruitful and inspiring. Despite its shortcomings, the reviewed volume offers some new insights into the history of industrialization and deindustrialization in today's Germany, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, as well as their cultural backgrounds and consequences. It may also be understood as a call for new comparative frameworks, or at least for re-considering the existing ones.

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